MAD CAVE

DAVE CHISHOLM

IS TED OK?

3

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DAVE CHISHOLM
STORY, ART & LETTERS

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Digital Version.

MAD CAVE

EVERYTHING IS ON FIRE.

AT ITS CORE, THE WORLD IS VIOLENT.

TRUST IS SOMETHING EXCEEDINGLY RARE AND HARD-EARNED, USUALLY BY TOIL.

THE PARAMETERS OF ANY ENGAGEMENT ARE DEFINED BY WHICHEVER PARTY HAS A GREATER CAPACITY FOR VIOLENCE.

THE GUSHING OF BLOOD GIVES ANY PERSON A THRILL.

WHEN ATTACKED BY A RABID WOLF, YOU WOULD NEVER RESORT TO REASON AS A DEFENSE.

IT IS THE SAME FOR THE WORLD OF MEN.

EVERY MUNDANE TASK IS A THIN VEIL OVER CRACKED SKULLS, A TORNADO OF DEAD BODIES.

...AND YOU, TED GREEN, ARE A VIOLENT BEING.

VIOLENCE IS THE ONLY UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE...

YOUR POWER, TED, IS DEFINED BY YOUR CAPACITY FOR VIOLENCE.

YOUR GLORY IS DEFINED BY YOUR CAPACITY FOR VIOLENCE.

YOUR CAPACITY FOR VIOLENCE WILL BE YOUR SALVATION.

PROGRESS IS A GROWING STACK OF THOSE LEFT IN YOUR WAKE.

KILL OR BE KILLED.

KILL OR BE KILLED.

KILL OR BE KILLED.

KILL OR

KILL

GAAAAAHHH!

I GUESS I'M HOMELESS NOW? OR, LIKE, I CAN NEVER GO BACK TO MY APARTMENT.

"KNOCK KNOCK-- IS ANYBODY HOME?"

WHAT THE HELL?

HI-DEE-HO, SARAH!

NOK NOK

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I KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE!

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THIS CAN'T BE GOOD.

LISTEN, BRODY, I--

IS THERE--

YOU'RE PAST DUE FOR A VISIT FROM THE AYN-STYNE WELCOMING COMMITTEE!

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--IS THERE SOMETHING YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT?

I'M CLOCKED-IN.

ALL BUSINESS WITH YOU, *EH?* OK--

--WE **DO** NEED TO TALK.

WHY DON'T YOU HAVE A VASE?

AREN'T FEMALES SUPPOSED TO HAVE VASES?

CAN YOU STOP?

TALK ABOUT WHAT?

FINE.

CLUNK

ABOUT YOU BREAKING PROTOCOL.

ABOUT YOU CROSSING **BOUNDARIES.**

ABOUT YOU AND **TED.**

NOW I ACTUALLY KIND OF **GET** HOW THE THREE LITTLE PIGS FELT. EXCEPT THAT, INSTEAD OF A BIG BAD WOLF--

I KNOW YOU'RE MEETING WITH TED--

--YOU'RE NOT EXACTLY BEING **STRATEGIC** ABOUT IT.

WHY?

I GUESS I'M JUST KIND OF A WORKAHOLIC, YOU KNOW? AND ULTIMATELY--

--I THINK I CAN **HELP** HIM.

HOW ARE YOU GOING TO **HELP** WHEN YOU GET BUSTED FOR CROSSING BOUNDARIES?

FOR CAUSING THAT **AWFUL** ACCIDENT?

ACTIONS HAVE **CONSEQUENCES,** KIDDO.

WHY HAVEN'T YOU, UM, **BUSTED** ME ALREADY, THEN?

I FIGURED IT COULDN'T HURT TO LET IT PLAY OUT.

ON TOP OF THAT--

--I **LIKE** YOU.

YOU'VE GOT SOME **SPICE.**

--I GET VISITED BY A NARCISSISTIC SIX-FOOT-FOUR COCKROACH.

I WANT TO TAKE YOU ON A DATE.

THAT'S AGAINST AYN-STYNE'S CODE OF ETHICS.

ETHICS CODE?

NOAH™ HAS **EIGHTEEN** CHILDREN--

--THAT WE KNOW OF--

--EACH WITH DIFFERENT FEMALES WHO ALL WORK FOR AYN-STYNE.

AM I MAKING SENSE?

AND WHO DO YOU THINK HANDLES IT WHEN SOMEONE **VIOLATES** THE ETHICS CODE?

...

...KARMA.

THAT'S RIGHT.

I **AM** THE ETHICS CODE, BABY.

I'LL PICK YOU UP TOMORROW AT NINE-O'CLOCK.

TONIGHT WON'T WORK, BUT I'M SURE I'LL SEE YOU AT THE GALA.

MAYBE YOU'RE THINKING, "YEP, I'D MOVE OUT OF MY APARTMENT, TOO, IF I WERE YOU," BUT--

--I CAN **HANDLE** BRODY. THIS ISN'T WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.

--I BET NOAH™ IS GOING TO ANNOUNCE A TRIP TO **MARS** TONIGHT.

IF YOU REMEMBER, MY LAST CALL ENDED IN A STRESSFUL PLACE WHEN TED'S SURVEILLANCE LINE LOST CONNECTIVITY.

I WASN'T SURE IF HE WAS, Y'KNOW...

ARE THEY ALL **MARTIANS?**

...IF HE WAS **OK.**

SARAH-- ARE YOU, *UM,* AVAILABLE?

PLEASE DO NOT FRATERNIZE WITH YOUR CO-WORKERS.

THEY JUST WANT TO GET HOME IN PEACE.

I'M-- I NEED--

SO YOU CAN IMAGINE MY RELIEF WHEN HE SHOWED UP AT WORK THIS MORNING.

--WHAT I MEAN IS--

LET THEM

--CAN YOU MEET .UP WITH ME RIGHT NOW?

I'M--

AND WHEN HE CALLED ME AFTER WORK--I MEAN, THE STUFF I SAW BEFORE HIS FEED CUT OUT--

--I FEEL LIKE I--

--I CAN'T HANDLE THIS ANYMORE.

--MY CURIOSITY WAS PIQUED.

A SPACESHIP?!

ARE YOU SURE?!

HOW--?

WATCH FUL SAFETY

I'M TELLING YOU--I KNOW IT SOUNDS INSANE.

I GOT TO THE END OF THAT HALLWAY AND BOOM, IT WAS THERE.

THEN I WAS IN DARKNESS.

THEN I WOKE UP AT HOME.

A MONTH AGO EVERYTHING WAS **FINE** AND **NORMAL.** I HAD A ROUTINE. AND NOW EVERYTHING'S JUST--

--JUST--

--AND NOW I HAVE THIS BIG IMPORTANT MANDATORY **EVENT** TONIGHT...

...I JUST KNOW SOMETHING BAD'S GONNA HAPPEN.

CAN'T YOU JUST SKIP IT?

I'LL LOSE MY JOB. IT'S **MANDATORY.**

BUT YOU SAW A FUCKING **SPACESHIP.**

YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE WITH NO JOB.

AS AN ASIDE, FUCK MANDATORY WORK EVENTS.

I DON'T KNOW IF THIS WILL HELP, BUT SOMETIMES I LIKE TO REMEMBER THAT, YOU KNOW, 90% OF ANXIETY IS PUTTING ATTENTION TOWARDS THINGS THAT NEVER ACTUALLY **HAPPEN.**

THINK ABOUT IT--

--YOU'VE WORKED THERE FOR **YEARS** AND **NOTHING** HAS HAPPENED.

DO YOU REALLY THINK **TONIGHT'S** THE NIGHT?

BUT NOW **THEY** KNOW THAT **I** KNOW.

LIKE YOU SAID, YOU **HAVE** TO GO--

--SO MAYBE YOU COULD, LIKE, HAVE YOUR COAT ON, SIT BY THE DOOR, BE READY TO SPLIT AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE--

--OR I COULD HELP YOU MAKE A PLAN...

...IN CASE SOMETHING **DOES** HAPPEN?

I GUESS I CAN MAKE A **PLAN.**

I DON'T KNOW.

IT'S JUST REALLY, REALLY **SCARY.**

WHAT HELPS WHEN YOU GET SCARED?

SOMETHING YOU CAN **DO?**

THAT'S WHY WE'RE **HERE.**

THIS IS WHERE I GO WHEN I'M SCARED.

TED...
...THIS IS REALLY CLOSE TO WHERE...
...THE CAR ACCIDENT...
I KNOW, RIGHT? IT'S WEIRD.
THIS PLACE CHILLS ME OUT.
I COME HERE EVERY NIGHT.
YOU'RE THE ONLY PERSON WHO KNOWS.
EVERY NIGHT?
I HAVE NIGHTMARES.
I HAVE A NIGHTMARE.
IT'S THIS VOICE IN THE SHADOWS TELLING ME ALL THIS STUFF--
--THAT I'M **VIOLENT,** ALL OF THIS, Y'KNOW, PHILOSOPHICAL JUSTIFICATION FOR VIOLENCE.
THEN THE SOURCE OF THE VOICE COMES OUT OF THE SHADOWS, AND--
--AND IT'S **ME.**
IT'S ME, COVERED IN BLOOD, TALKING TO MYSELF. I THINK I'M--
--I'M A **VIOLENT** PERSON. I WAS **BORN** VIOLENT. I **DREAM** OF VIOLENCE.
IT'S JUST WHO I **AM.**
NO.
THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS--
--AS A PERSON BEING **BORN** VIOLENT.
VIOLENCE IS A THING THAT PEOPLE **CHOOSE.**
YOU HAVE FREE WILL, TED--YOU CAN **CHOOSE** TO **NOT** BE VIOLENT.
YOU DON'T KNOW THAT.
SURE I DO. EVERY ACT OF VIOLENCE IS A CHOICE.
I'M GLAD I MET YOU, SARAH.
I THINK THIS IS THE MOST I'VE EVER TALKED TO ANOTHER PERSON.
THANK YOU.
YOU'RE A TRUE FRIEND.
THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN THE PERFECT MOMENT TO COME CLEAN TO TED, TO TELL HIM THE TRUTH ABOUT MY JOB, TO AT LEAST KEEP **THAT** VARIABLE UNDER MY CONTROL.
BUT OF COURSE I SWALLOWED MY WORDS.

HELLO?
SARAH? ARE YOU AT **HOME?!**
OH, HI, JANICE-- YEAH, I'M AT HOME MAKING PASTA.
WHAT PART OF **"MANDATORY"** DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?
GET DRESSED-UP AND GET TO THE GALA-- **NOW!**
BUT--WHAT IF MY SUBJECTS SEE ME?
YOUR SUBJECTS DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE!
OH, RIGHT.
BE HERE ASAP IF YOU WANT TO KEEP YOUR JOB!
HOW THE HELL WAS I SUPPOSED TO KNOW THAT "MANDATORY" APPLIED TO THE CORPORATE **STALKING** TEAM?!
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YOU KNOW ME.
DING
I'M A SENSITIVE PERSON, RIGHT?
PLEASE ENGAGE ONLY IN SMALL-TALK.
SAMPLE TOPICS INCLUDE:
PARTIES LIKE THIS JUST **DRAIN** ME--
FSSHH
UHH...

SUMMERTIME RECIPES FOR POTATOES--

HI-DEE-HO!

--AND THAT'S NOT EVEN CONSIDERING BRODY'S ATTENDANCE.

LOOK WHAT THE CAT DRAGGED IN!

COOL COAT, YOU WEIRDO.

WHY YOU GOTTA HIDE YOUR FIGURE LIKE THAT?

AND, ON TOP OF THAT, THE WORLD IS ON THE BRINK OF A CATASTROPHIC WAR, PEOPLE ARE STRUGGLING, AND SO WHAT DOES AYN-STYNE DO?

--THE BEST SONG 20

MAKES YOU LOOK LIKE A GREAT BIG FAT PERSON.

--LEAST-FAVORITE CHILDREN'S MOVIE--

THROW A BIG-ASS PARTY.

I'M THINKING TOMORROW WE COULD GO TO **MEATBUCKET.** THEY'VE GOT A FRIDAY DEAL--

I HEARD FOUR DIFFERENT PEOPLE SAY "WE'RE SET FOR LIFE" AT THIS THING--

--INTERESTING OR QUIRKY SNACK IDEAS--

SHIT.

--I'M ON THIS STRICT DIET, YOU KNOW, BASED ON WHAT NOAH™ EATS.

--I THINK IT'S GONNA BE THE NEW AYN-STYNE SLOGAN--

OH WELL--

--I GUESS LE CANARD NOIR COULD WORK--

--THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN SANDWICH--

BUT I'M FILIBUSTERING. THAT'S NOT WHAT THIS STORY'S ABOUT.

--OR FAVORI WEATHER-BASE MEMORIES.

TED, HOLD UP!

YOU--

--YOU LIED TO ME.

Y-YOU'RE ONE OF **THEM.**

I TRUSTED YOU!

NO, TED, LISTEN--

--IT'S MY JOB--

--IT'S JUST MY JOB.

I WORK FOR AYN-STYNE IN SURVEILLANCE.

MY JOB IS TO WATCH **YOU.**

TO KEEP AN EYE ON **YOU.**

SURVEILLANCE?!

ALL THOSE TIMES YOU KNEW **JUST** WHAT TO SAY TO ME--

--YOU WERE WORKING FROM A **SCRIPT!**

THOSE CONVERSATIONS MEANT SOMETHING TO ME!

NONE OF IT WAS A LIE, TED.

NOTHING I SAID WAS A LIE-- I SWEAR!

I GOT **REPRIMANDED** BECAUSE I TRIED TO **HELP YOU!**

I JUST COULDN'T TELL YOU THE WHOLE TRUTH.

SNIFF

SO DOES THIS MEAN I **AM** VIOLENT?

EVERY ASE TAKE YOUR SEATS FOR THE VERY SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT FROM YOUR CE .

HEY, BUD--

--WHAT'S GOT YOU DOWN?

WE'RE AT AYN-STYNE--

--THAT MEANS **WE'RE SET FOR LIFE!**

I'VE GOT A BIG SURPRISE FOR YOU LATER ON!

EVERYBODY PLEASE TAKE YOUR SEATS--

--FOR A VERY SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT FROM YOUR CEO, NOAH™

I CAN JUST HEAR YOU ASKING, "SO WHAT **IS** THIS STORY ABOUT, THEN?"

HELLO, MY FRIENDS. I'LL BE BRIEF WITH MY SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT.

AS YOU KNOW, THIS BRANCH OF AYN-STYNE HAS A TRIPARTATE FOCUS--

--ONE WING FOR SURVEILLANCE TECH, ONE FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND ONE FOCUSED ON OUR ADVANCING BIOTECH DIVISION.

I WANT MY NEW YORK CITY TEAM MEMBERS TO BE THE FIRST TO KNOW THE BIG NEWS..

I AM IN A UNIQUE POSITION.

I HAVE BROUGHT HUMANITY BACK FROM THE ABYSS OF DOOM, EMPOWERING THE INDIVIDUAL AGAINST THE NUMEROUS EXISTENTIAL THREATS WE ALL FACE DAILY.

THANKS TO ME, PEOPLE ARE **SAFER** AND **MORE INFORMED** THAN THEY'VE EVER BEEN.

I BROADCAST THIS MESSAGE OF **PEACE** FROM THE DOME, THE CENTER OF AN EMERGING GLOBAL CONFLICT OVER THE UNEXPECTED RESOURCE **SURPLUS** RESULTING FROM THE TRAGEDY.

IT IS TIME FOR ME TO PUT MY MONEY WHERE MY MOUTH IS.

I AM RUNNING FOR THE BIGGEST, MOST IMPORTANT JOB IN THE WORLD:

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

AS OF THIS MOMENT, YOUR TASKS WILL ALL SHIFT--THIS BRANCH IS NOW AN INTEGRAL PART OF MY CAMPAIGN TEAM. UNTIL THE END OF THIS PROCESS, ONLY THE MOST VITAL WORK WILL CONTINUE.

TOGETHER, YOU CAN HELP ME LEAD AMERICA-- LEAD **HUMANITY**--INTO A NEW GOLDEN AGE, THE LIKES OF WHICH THIS PLANET HAS NEVER BEFORE WITNESSED!

CLAP CLAP CLAP

I'LL MOVE ON TO THIS NEXT ANNOUNCEMENT AS YOU ALL SIGN THE **NDA'S** THAT ARE CIRCULATING.

REMINDER THAT YOUR EXIT OF THIS GALA IS DEPENDENT ON YOUR SIGNING OF SAID DOCUMENT.

OBVIOUSLY THIS NEXT ITEM PALES IN COMPARISON TO NOAH™'S MASSIVE ANNOUNCEMENT--

--BUT WE HAD A SPECIAL REQUEST FOR RECOGNITION OF AN AYN-STYNE TEAM MEMBER FROM ONE OF OUR BRANCH SUPERVISORS, SKIP LIPTON.

CAN WE GET A SPOTLIGHT ON THE RECIPIENT?

AS

TED GREEN IS AN **IDEAS MAN.**

TED IS A DESIGNER IN OUR MARKETING DIVISION, AND IS REALLY **THE** VOICE OF AYN-STYNE'S **POSITIVE PARANOIA--**

--THE **EMPOWERING** PARANOIA THAT IS THE TOUCHSTONE OF OUR CONTINUED SUCCESS.

SOME RECOGNITION CAN'T HURT, CAN IT, PAL?

COME ON UP AND SPEAK FROM THE HEART.

AS

AS

I--

--I--

--I--

--I-I KNOW--

--I-I KNOW--

I'LL LET YOU KNOW WHEN I FIGURE IT OUT.

--I KNOW **EXACTLY** WHAT YOU ARE, YOU INHUMAN **MONSTERS.**

WHAT, DID YOU THINK NOBODY WOULD FIGURE IT OUT?!

MICE--

--M--M--

--MOUSES MADE OF **MEAT**?!

A ROBOT **ARMY**?!

BUH--

--BUH--

--BABIES IN TUBES?!

THRASH METAL?!

--SICK OF THIS WEAK BULLSHIT--

AND A GODDAMNED **SPACESHIP** READY TO--

--YOU LITTLE--

TEC

DIFF

We'll be r

...H-HOW ABOUT A ROUND OF APPLAUSE FOR TONIGHT'S SKETCH COMEDY PERFORMANCE BY YOUR VERY OWN TEAM MEMBERS?!

ERR...

TED!

TAP TAP TAP

GUHHH...

BRODY, **DUDE**--

--WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?

YOU'RE GOING TO **SHOOT** HIM--

--FOR **WHAT?!**

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON, SARAH.

BACK OFF.

TED, ARE YOU OK?!

...GUH--GUUHHH...

...WHUHH..

LOOK AT HIM, BRODY.

PUT YOUR FUCKING GUN **DOWN.**

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.

I DON'T KNOW?

I **SEE** YOU, BRODY.

...FFFFFFEHHH...

I KNOW **EXACTLY** WHO YOU ARE.

YOU'RE JUST LIKE MY DAD.

SEE, **HIS** DAD USED TO BEAT HIM UP.

HIS DAD WAS FUCKING **RUTHLESS.**

"FROM AN AGE THAT WAS **WAY** TOO YOUNG, HIS DAD WOULD COME HOME FROM WORK AND JUST BEAT THE SHIT OUT OF HIM.

"'THAT'S THE WAY **I** WAS RAISED,' HE'D SAY.

"SOUND FAMILIAR, BRODY?

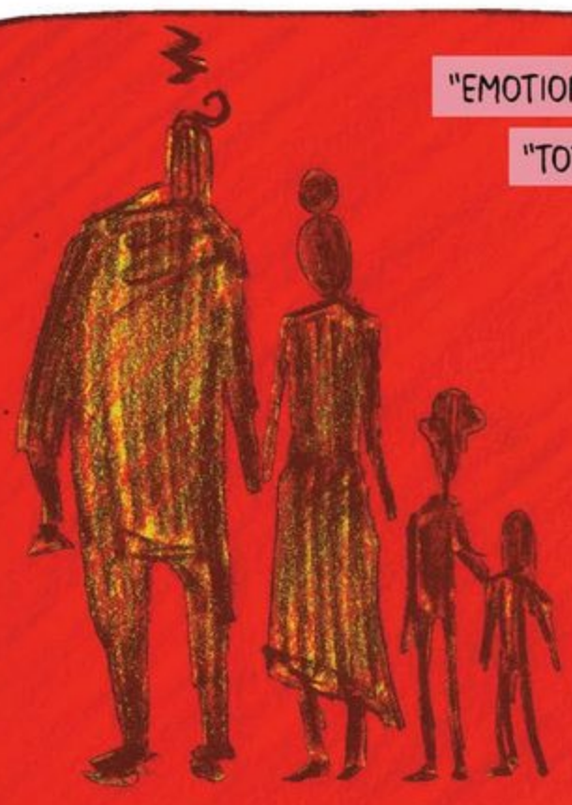
"HOW WERE **YOU** RAISED?

"AND SO THAT'S HOW MY DAD LEARNED HOW TO DEAL WITH SHIT.

"WITH **VIOLENCE.**

"BY BEING A **BULLY.**

"EVERY INTERACTION WAS *TRANSACTIONAL* WITH AN UNDERCURRENT OF *INTIMIDATION* AND *TERROR.*



"EMOTIONALLY, MY DAD WAS **ALWAYS** THAT LITTLE KID. NO COPING TOOLS.

"TOTAL FRAGILITY BENEATH A FACADE OF TOUGHNESS.

"AND SO HE MET MY MOM WHO IS, OF COURSE, THE ULTIMATE CARETAKER.

"THEY MADE IT WORK IN A WAY, FOR A WHILE, BECAUSE MY MOM WAS TOUGH AS HELL.

"JUST LIKE **I** SEE **YOU,** BRODY--

"--**SHE** SAW **HIM.**

"SHE KNEW HIS STORY, KNEW WHAT HE WAS *CAPABLE* OF.

"AND SHE HELD IT OVER HIM.

"DEEP DOWN, SHE **KNEW** SHIT WAS GONNA HAPPEN.

"AND SO WHEN HE INEVITABLY CAME FOR ME AND MY BROTHER, WHEN HE FULLY BECAME **HIS OWN** DAD, SHE TOOK US IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND LEFT.

"DISAPPEARED LIKE FUCKING **BATMAN.**

"NO HALF-MEASURES FOR HER.

"LISTEN, BRODY: IN HIS DEFENSE, IT ALMOST DESTROYED HIM."

HE FINALLY GOT BACK IN TOUCH WITH ME AFTER THIRTEEN YEARS, AND YOU KNOW WHAT?

HE GOT IT. HE WENT TO THERAPY, DID THE WORK, AND REALIZED WHAT A PIECE OF SHIT HE WAS.

WHAT A PIECE OF SHIT **HIS DAD** WAS.

HE *CHANGED HIS MIND.*

HE **APOLOGIZED,** BRODY. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU APOLOGIZED, *HUH?*

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOUD DIDN'T TRY TO BULLY THE WORLD INTO SERVING YOU?

IT DOESN'T NEED TO BE THIS WAY.

LOOK AT TED, JUST, LIKE--

--HE'S A **PERSON,** AND HE'S **HURTING.** WHY CAUSE MORE PAIN?

JUST STOP!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS.

IN THAT MOMENT, I THOUGHT I HAD SUCCEEDED.

THAT I PULLED THE CURTAIN AND REVEALED THE HURT CHILD THAT LIVED INSIDE OF BRODY--

YOU FEMALES TALK TOO MUCH.

--AND THAT I SAVED TED FROM AN HORRIFIC FATE.

BAM

BUT, AS USUAL, I WAS WRONG.

WUMP

I WANTED TO BARF.

WHO'S THE MAN-OF-WAR NOW?!

KRAWFG

WUMP

NO NO NO, TED--

--NO--

BUT INSTEAD, JUST LIKE BEFORE, I THOUGHT ABOUT ME AND YOU IN ROME, ABOUT *THE PIETA*.

TED GREEN--

--THIS IS THE KARMA TEAM. WE HAVE YOU SURROUNDED!

RELEASE YOUR HOSTAGES AND SURRENDER!

HOSTAGES?!

WE HAVE STOPPED THE ELEVATOR--

--YOU ARE IN THE SUB-BASEMENT AND OUR SQUAD IS CLOSING IN--

HE'S FUCKING **DEAD,** YOU ASSHOLES!

--THERE'S NO ESCAPE!

POOM

...WHAT...?

HEY!

WHO ARE YOU?

HOW ARE YOU HERE?

I-I DON'T--

--WWHA--?!

GUHHHHHH!

AHHH!

WHAT THE FUCK?!

TED?!

SARAH--

I-I SAW SOMETHING!

WHAT--

--HOW ARE YOU ALIVE?

ALL THAT STUFF YOU SHARED ABOUT YOUR FAMILY--

--I BELIEVE YOU--

YOU GOT SHOT IN THE HEAD!

--AND I KNOW, YOUR JOB, THE SURVEILLANCE--

--I KNOW YOU DIDN'T MEAN TO HURT ME--

--AND **WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER NOW,** RIGHT?

TED--

--OF COURSE!

POW

THAT WAS THE MOMENT WHEN I REALIZED I'D NEVER GO BACK TO MY APARTMENT AGAIN.

AND I LEFT THAT PASTA OUT.

CAREFUL!

CAREFUL!

GET US *DOWN!*

I WILL...

...WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF THE CITY.

SHIT
SHIT
SHIT

I FEEL SICK.

SARAH--

--I...

...I DON'T THINK I'M **HUMAN.**

*AM I THE **ALIEN?***

HEY--

--HEY YOU.

YOU'D BETTER HURRY UP AND GET IN THE VAN!

DID WE JUST **FLY?**

HI! I'M **CHRISTINA.**

KARMA IS GOING TO BE **RIGHT** BEHIND YOU!

MOVE YOUR ASSES!

MAYBE WE SHOULD GO WITH HER.

SARAH, I REALIZED I ONLY EVER TALK ABOUT **MYSELF.**

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT STUFF ABOUT YOUR FAMILY--

--I'M SO SORRY!

I GUESS EVERYBODY'S JUST A BUNDLE OF **STORIES,** TED.

"SO, WHAT DO YOU THINK?"

"IT'S QUITE A STORY.

"YOU'RE SERIOUS ABOUT IT?

"THE PRESIDENCY?"

"WHY WOULDN'T I BE?"

WELL, FOR ONE, **SEVENTY-THREE** SITTING U.S. SENATORS AND A WHOPPING **TWO-HUNDRED-AND-EIGHTY** MEMBERS OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ARE PEOPLE **YOU** GOT ELECTED--

--PEOPLE WITH DIRECT TIES TO AYN-STYNE--

--PEOPLE WHO ESSENTIALLY WORK FOR **YOU.**

THEY'VE STILL PROVEN THEMSELVES INEPT.

THE WORLD NEEDS A **LEADER.**

HM.

R RRRR-

YOU'RE HERE, AT GROUND ZERO, APPEARING TO PLAY **JESUS.**

SICK, NEEDY CHILDREN INSIDE AN ANARCHIC COMMUNITY.

AND NOW THE **PRESIDENCY?**

IT DOESN'T ADD UP. *WHAT'S THE PLAY?*

THIS IS LITTLE **CHRISTOPHER.**

HE'S SOMEONE WHO MEANS QUITE A LOT TO ME.

I KEEP HIM CLOSE AND PRAY FOR HIS RECOVERY EVERY DAY.

MY "*PLAY*," KYLE, IS CHANGING HEARTS FROM THE **BOTTOM** WHILE AMASSING INFLUENCE FROM THE **TOP.**

THIS PLACE IS A LITTLE BIT OF HEAVEN ON EARTH, ISN'T IT?

THERE WERE **FIVE MURDERS** HERE LAST WEEK.

THREE RAPES.

FREEDOM COMES AT A PRICE, AND **VIOLENCE** IS THE CURRENCY.

HM.

WELL, *AH--*

--AH, FUCK IT.

THIS BRINGS ME TO MY NEXT QUESTION--

I'VE BEEN CONDUCTING A MAJOR INVESTIGATION INTO AYN-STYNE.

ARE YOU AWARE OF JUST HOW MANY SUBSIDIARY CORPORATIONS ARE PART OF THE AYN-STYNE WEB?

I THOUGHT YOU'D HAVE MORE TO SAY ABOUT--

OH, I DO.

I'LL GET THERE.

THERE ARE **25,456** CORPORATIONS. IT'S A LOT!

IT REALLY TOOK A FAIR AMOUNT OF RESEARCH, NOAH™!

AYN-STYNE

R RRRRR

AND, IN BUILDING A SPREADSHEET, I NOTICED...

...**ODDITIES.**

NATIONALIZED MILITARY DEFENSE DOESN'T **REALLY** EXIST ANYMORE, RIGHT?

IT'S ALL BEEN PRIVATIZED.

CORPORATE ARMIES.

BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES, RUSSIA, CHINA AND OTHER VARIOUS INTERESTS, THERE ARE **ELEVEN** CORPORATE NATION STATES ON THE BRINK OF VIOLENT COMBAT HERE AT THE DOME--

--HERE AT THE **END OF THE WORLD.**

AND, AFTER UNEARTHING SHELL COMPANY AFTER SHELL COMPANY, I DISCOVERED SOMETHING:

AYN-STYNE OWNS ALL ELEVEN ARMIES POISED FOR WAR.

YOU'RE A PRETTY SMART GUY, KYLE.

LET'S LEAVE MY TENT, WALK AROUND A BIT.

I'LL SHOW YOU MY FAVORITE SPOT IN TENT CITY.

NOAH™, **ELEVEN** ARMIES-- OWNED BY **YOU**--

--ISN'T IT KIND OF...

...RECKLESS?

POINTLESS?

STUPID?

WALK WITH ME.

I'LL TELL YOU EVERYTHING.

TO BE CONTINUED...

MAD CAVE

DAVE CHISHOLM

IS TED OK?

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AVAILABLE MAY 2026

SPECIAL PREVIEW

RUSSELL · HOLDEN · JORDAN · BEAUDOIN

MAD CAVE

#1

DOG TAG

The Office of War Information.
Southwick House.
Portsmouth, England.

May, 1944.

My war began when my CO, Captain Ronald George, unexpectedly summoned me to a meeting.

THIS HIM?

Beware of meetings you weren't expecting.

COLONEL, THIS IS *TOM FULLER.* A CORRESPONDENT FOR US OVER AT *STARS & STRIPES.*

WRITES A VERY POPULAR DAY-IN-THE-LIFE COLUMN.

I DO CARTOONS, TOO, SIR.

THE STARS AND STRIPES

"TOMFULLERY"

BY TOM FU

"BASIC TRAINING"

TOM FULLER

SON, WE'RE SENDING YOU TO DOVER. YOU'LL BE ATTACHED TO *FUSAG.*

WE'RE SENDING YOU TO COVER THE FIRST ARMY AND ITS PREPARATIONS FOR OUR PLANNED INVASION OF EUROPE.

SIR, I AM DEEPLY HONORED TO BE CHOSEN TO COVER THE INVASION. I WON'T LET YOU DOWN!

HERE'S THE GREASY PART, SON. YOU ***WON'T*** BE PART OF THE INVASION.

PATTON'S GONNA BE SITTIN' TIGHT IN DOVER... AND SO ARE ***YOU.***

THE FIRST ARMY IS A ***RUSE.*** TO MAKE HITLER THINK THE INVASION WILL COME AT CALAIS. THERE'S HARDLY ANYONE STATIONED IN DOVER.

BUT YOU'LL MAKE IT SEEM LIKE THERE'S THOUSANDS OF TROOPS BUSTIN' HUMPS AND GETTING READY FOR SOMETHING ***BIG.***

GOT IT?

SIR, I'M... I'M JUST NOT SURE I CAN DO THAT.

AND WHY ***NOT?***

I'M A TRAINED ***JOURNALIST,*** SIR. I HAVE A DUTY--

TRAINED ***WHERE?***

MY HIGH SCHOOL NEWSPAPER. THE ***JOLIET BEE,*** SIR.

THE REAL JOURNALISTS ARE ALREADY LYING FOR US. IN FACT, THE ENEMY IS ***EXPECTING*** FALSE STORIES IN THE MAJOR PRESS.

BUT IF THEY'RE GETTING CONFIRMATION FROM... WHAT WAS YOUR PODUNK COLUMN CALLED?

TOM FULLERY, SIR.

THAT'S THE SORT OF LIE THEY'LL FIND CONVINCING.

IF WE WANTED A PROFESSIONAL JOURNALIST TO WRITE IT, WE'D ***HAVE*** ONE.

WE CHOSE ***YOU*** BECAUSE YOU'RE AN ENLISTED MAN.

THAT WAY, IF YOU SPILL THE BEANS, WE CAN HAVE YOU ***SHOT.***

OH. I SEE.

ANYWAY, THAT'S THE ASSIGNMENT. DISMISSED, PRIVATE.

READ THE FULL STORY IN

DOG TAG #1

MAY 2026

MAD CAVE